Case Study: Water ATMs in Rajasthan

(From the book *Advantage India: From Challenge to Opportunity* by Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam and Mr. Srijan Pal Singh)

Rajasthan, the desert state of the country, is the largest state in India. With a 10.4% geographical area of country, it has 5.5% of the country's population and 18.70% of the livestock. But it has only 1.16 per cent of surface water available in the country. During summers, the people in the state face acute water shortage. We came across an innovate model, run as a Public Private Partnership (PPP), which was used to solve the water problem in the state—Water ATMs. A Scottish energy corporation and the use of modern technology enabled a metamorphosis in two districts of Rajasthan which were earlier infamous for acute water shortage. Through this water ATMs, the water is now available 24x7 to the villagers at a cost of Rs 5 for a quantity of 20 litres. Cairn India, a part of the global natural resources giant Vedanta Group, runs this programme as 'Jeevan Amrit Project'. For this project, Cairn India has collaborated with Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) of the Government of Rajasthan, Tata Projects and the respective village panchayats. The aim of this project is to provide potable drinking water at the doorsteps of the local community. Kiosks with Reverse Osmosis (RO) plants are installed at several villages such as Guda, Kawas, Jogasar, Bhakharpur, etc. Because of this project, over 22000 people in the state are benefitted and get portable water to drink. It is expected that the project will be scaled up in the near future to benefit larger sections of the community. Currently, 22 RO plants (17 with swipe card facilities) cater to the needs of drinking water of the villagers. Villagers get clean drinking water by swiping their cards in the machine just like using a normal bank ATM card to withdraw money. These cards come with an initial value of Rs 150 and can be further recharged as per their needs by the villagers. Moreover, these machines are also taken to nearby 'Dhanis' (hamlets) at a modest additional cost of Rs 1-2 so that this facility can also be availed by the people living in surrounding areas. This revenue model helps in making these kiosks self-sustainable. The revenue generated is utilized for operating and maintaining the kiosks in an efficient manner.

The cost of these plants is financed by Cairn India. These plants are installed and delivered by Tata Projects. The Public Health Engineering Department of the Government of Rajasthan (PHED) ensures the provision of a primary water connection and premises to put up the plant. The operation and maintenance of this kiosk is done by a fifteen-member 'Village Water Committee' formed under the aegis of the panchayat. Dhara, a local NGO, helps in capacity building and handholding the project. There have been various positive outcomes because of this project. Because of the availability of safe drinking water, there has been a substantial reduction in the occurrence of diseases among the children and the elderly citizens in these villages. Cases of joint pain among the villagers, which are majorly caused because of the

high amount of fluoride in drinking water, have also reduced. Moreover, these projects have also led to the creation of Water Committees which exhibit an efficient model of self-governance. These committees not only undertake the efficient management of the Water ATMs but also assist in various developmental activities in the area.